

Foundation of All Good Qualities

Eleventh teaching

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Dhargyey Buddhist Centre

I would like to resume from where we left off, we were going through a citation from a great master called Boudoun Thamkyey Denpa. He says, that without having any duration for oneself, one faces death. It is like animals taken to a freezing work, with every turn of the wheel, with every step, they are getting closer to the freezing work, ultimately to be slaughtered. In the same way, in our case, although we are not driven in a truck, the passage of every second brings us closer to death. Therefore, don't entertain so many thoughts, *"I will do this today, I will do that tomorrow,"* don't fill your mind with hundreds of thoughts. Throw them to the wind and bring them to one unitary purpose.

There will come a time where one will be awaited by the forces of Lord of death. There will be a time when one will be on one's deathbed and one will draw their last breathe. At that time, there is nothing that is of benefit except spiritual wealth, spiritual virtues. Therefore, gather the jewel of Dharma.

In the same vein, an Indian master who visited Tibet just north of Nepal called Dingri, says:

Oh people of Dingri karmic fruition and law of causality are definite. Therefore abstain from unwholesome actions. Oh people of Dingri, in the world hereafter friends are few. Therefore, trust all your mind in Dharma.

This is again calling upon us that at the time of death and beyond death – which is certain – nothing but spiritual goodness is of benefit. Therefore we should do the most.

Talking about how and when we die is not the final death - we will keep on being born. On this point a Tibetan master called Bouton says,

We can deduced logically that there is past and future lifetimes. How? If human life comes causelessly, then it would be that everything that exists is human being. Secondly, if human life were to emerge from matter without prior preceding human mind as a cause, then it is high time all the world, all mountains and valleys filled with rock and soil, be filled with human beings.

This statement from this master, is like a thunderbolt statement for people who are nihilistic about lifetimes.

Mountains, valleys, stones are said to be matter, whereas human, animals are said to be sentient. How do you distinguish the two? How do you differentiate between matter and persons – not just human beings, but all sentient beings?

The question arises from the fact that if the prior cause for human existence, human mind, were not there and it were to arise from matter, the whole world – even the wilderness – would be filled with human beings.

Audience: Matter doesn't have mind.

Geshe-la: But scientists say all vegetation has life.

Audience: That's not consciousness, they don't have mind.

Geshe-la: Again, if something has life, then it is not matter. The definition of matter, is that which is formed by particles. Matter is things that are composed of particles that can't move.

There are two kinds of matter. Outer and inner matter. Outer matters are houses, mountains, trees and so on. Inner matters are matter that goes to make your body. Whichever matter it is, matter is composed of particles.

What do you think person is? My first question was, what difference do you see between what is called person and what is called matter? Does it follow that a human is a person?

Audience: Yes.

Geshe-la: Does it follow that if x is a human, x can utter human language and understand the meaning of language? If you say yes, to my question, then what about a person who was born deaf? Can they understand human language?

Audience: Helen Kelleher, she was deaf and mute and wrote books.

Geshe-la: Definition of human is somebody who can speak and understand the speech meaning. A mute person, is he a human?

Audience: Not by Buddhist definition.

Geshe-la: Is Buddhist definition a lie?

Audience: It's limited.

Audience: If they understand sign language and can communicate, then that's understanding speech.

Geshe-la: Yes. A thing to remember is that the Buddhist definition is somebody who can utter and understand the meaning of utterances. But if somebody can utter and understand utterances' meaning does not necessarily follow that they are human. The Dalai Lama gives his parrot as an example. In the Potala Palace he used to have a parrot that spoke different sentences, that could recite mantra, Om Mani Padme Hung. And when we wanted something he would utter and he would be given some apple. But despite the fact that the parrot can utter such language, it's not human. Such creatures can understand when you talk to them too.

Audience: If your mother who has cognitive impairments and can't speak, then is she then deemed non-human by the Buddhist definition?

Geshe-la: That's right, the Buddhist definition is a human is someone who can utter human language and understand the utterance meaning. But the real question is, does it follow that somebody who can utter human language is necessarily a human? By that matter, does it follow that someone who can't utter human language isn't human?

In logic we debate the definition of a human. Someone who has learned the definition says, "It's a person who can utter human language and understand the utterance meaning."

Then does it follow then that someone who can utter human language and understand the meaning is human?

If someone says yes, they have to stand by the definition. Then what about the parrot? Is the parrot a human? Then the next line of reasoning is used.

Losang: I said to Geshe-la, if someone can utter human language and understand human language, and is in the class of human beings, then he or she is a human.

Geshe-la: Isn't being able to utter and understand meaning, definition of human?

Losang: I said no.

Geshe-la: If you don't accept that definition, you contradict the text...

That's why we need to see, that's the purpose of asking questions and to think about it. Everything has a definition in Buddhism, but can the definition hold water in all circumstances?

Also in that case, please remember there is eight points of equivalence between a definition and definiendum:

- i. If it is a definition, it should also be a definiendum.
- ii. If it's the definiendum, it's also the definition.

And so on. There are eight points of relationship. If there is a human, there is somebody who fulfils the definition. If there isn't a human, then there isn't someone who fulfils the definition and so on. Positively, negatively, there are eight points of equivalence.

Establishing Future Lives

Moreover, talking about the existence of future lives, a death is not the final death. The text says,

Furthermore there have been many great scholar practitioners having clairvoyance, extrasensory perception who could see their and other people's consciousness in the intermediate existence as well as who could see previous lifetimes of one and others.

What is being mentioned is there is a lot of evidence and proofs to establish past and future lives. There is hardly any satisfactory evidence to establish the non-existence of past or future lives. There are many reasons to support past and future lives. On the other side, very few reasons establishing non-existence. Things like this happen more often than not in India, and 2-3 years back there was a girl who remembered very vividly her past life.

According to what I've heard, there was this girl who remembered her last life and insisted her current-life parents take her to a particular house. When she went there, she then pointed to everything that was owned by her previous self. Of course there have been other schools of thought who propound or assert that there are no past lives, there will be no future lives and consciousness, mind has no endless continuum. That when a person dies a physical death, that also is the death of their consciousness - with the discontinuation of the body, the mind cease to continue. When asked to come up with the evidence despite insistence, evidence is not that satisfactory. Whereas Buddhism and other schools of thought believe there are past and future lives and the rationale for existence of past and future lives is based on the continuation of mind, that the mind continues to exist from moment to moment to moment. Even when the physical body dies at death, the body is not mind, they are separate and the mind moves on. That is used as evidence to show there is past lives and future lives.

Another evidence that could be advanced towards establishing past and future lives is the method of recognising lamas or incarnations and you know the story behind that. If it is known a lama who died a few years back has been reborn, now there is a young child. To see whether the child is real or not, different objects are presented to the child: one real that belonged to the previous lama and a perfect replica. The same set of objects are presented to contending candidates. The real candidate doesn't make any error in choosing their own past objects. That is taken as evidence that that child is the continuation of the lama of the last life.

Q&A

Maybe I will stop here, have you got any questions.

Audience: Regarding the interaction between the body and mind, how would Geshe-la explain that? Are there answers in the abhidharma or does he have to resort to tantra to give a full interaction? How do they interact? It's important as materialists say, if you change the brain you change the mind and that supports their position.

If you put electrodes into the brain, you can actually manipulate what the person perceives. The materialists say that supports that the mind is brain, so it's important to understand how Buddhism would explain that.

Geshe-la: Of course science has believed that brain is mind. But there have been some strange phenomena, the brainless body...

From the teachings of the Dalai Lama who is interested in the brain and mind interaction and their connection, a lot of scientists do not believe that there is consciousness apart from the brain. But there have been some strange phenomena where, the Dalai Lama says, in some weird places there were some people without heads. They were not able to speak, eat but they still were alive and moving. When they were seen by scientists, such things have lead scientists to questions their assumption about brain and mind. How is it possible people are brainless yet can do human things? They are beginning to wonder that there could be consciousness apart from brain.

A human child is conceived between egg and sperm. Now it has been pointed out that would a child be conceived whenever egg and sperm meet and the womb is perfectly fine? Not all the time when the egg and sperm meet in a healthy womb is a child formed. It's only when the fourth factor, consciousness, enters the mixture of egg and sperm in a healthy womb that a child is formed. The intermediate existence is really crowded existence, there are thousands upon thousands of intermediate consciousnesses looking for a next rebirth. Only when a consciousness has karmic connection to be a child of certain parents whose egg and sperm meet in a healthy environment, is that consciousness is reborn.

The Buddhist insistence on the need to practice virtue is to help one's consciousness in the bardo state be pushed by the positive karmic prevailing energies in the right direction. If you don't have positive karma to support the consciousness then it will be born, but in unhappy circumstances.

If Geshe-la sitting on the throne meets death, it will be the death of his physical body, but it will not be the death of his mind. His mind will move on. Then, his mind will be in the state between the last life and the next life. It is called the intermediate existence. The top priority of consciousness in the intermediate existence is to seek an immediate rebirth and therefore it will be looking for chances of rebirth. There will be all kinds of chances, but if Geshe-la has done good deeds then his consciousness will be guided towards favourable future circumstances. If he has done bad deeds, his consciousness will be pushed towards unfavourable circumstances; this is how rebirth is believed to occur.

That's why all teachings, particularly all Lamrim teachings, point to the fact that we need to make the most of the opportunity offered by this life. So that we are human speaks volumes about what we have done in the past. Only good deeds will lead, guide consciousness to human existences. We can't rest on our laurels on the ground that we are humans. We are still in a state of vulnerability and if we don't do good deeds continually, this human product of our past life will be responsible for an unfortunate future existence.

The gist of everything I've said is that every moment we are getting closer to death. So don't entertain the idea, "I'll do it the next day," don't entertain the idea you'll do it one day. Don't entertain hundreds of such postponing thoughts. Bring all your thoughts into one unity of purpose: to do Dharma now and here.